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Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey California

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# Marine Corps Assistant Commandant Explores Emerging Concepts, Capabilities at NPS

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MC2 Tom Tonthat | December 11, 2020



Assistant Commandant for the Marine Corps Gen. Gary Thomas talks with Naval Postgraduate School Information Warfare student Marine Corps Capt. Matt Dunovant during a visit to the university, Dec. 9, to observe the implications of student research on future concepts and capabilities of the Marine Corps.

On a trip to observe emerging technologies in practice, Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps (ACMC) Gen. Gary Thomas, accompanied by five other general officers, visited the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS), Dec. 9, to engage directly with university faculty and students from key labs and institutes about the implications of their research on future concepts and capabilities for the Marine Corps.

The visit to NPS was part Thomas' West Coast innovation trip which allowed him and other senior leaders – including the Deputy Commandant of Information Lt. Gen. Loretta Reynolds and Assistant Deputy Commandant for Combat Development and Integration Maj. Gen. Kevin Liams – to see firsthand how organizations are leveraging technological advances in innovative ways that hold promise for the future force of the Marine Corps.

The key focus at NPS was to examine advances within the information environment including cyber, space, machine learning, artificial intelligence and data analytics.

Investing in research and education, the Marine Corps sends more than 150 students a year to NPS to work on key operational Marine Corps challenges. Therefore, nearly 40 Marine Corps students from all four of NPS' graduate schools had the chance to engage with Thomas and the cohort of senior leaders, presenting their research and getting feedback from the highest levels of Marine Corps leadership about how their research could be implemented.

"We greatly value the education that is made available here [at NPS] because it makes us better as a warfighting organization," Thomas told the students. "We greatly appreciate a lot of the hard work that goes into your efforts as you complete your degree programs. How can we make the master's program even better? It's about making sure that we are aligning and leveraging the work that you are doing here."

During the presentations, NPS student Marine Corps Capt. Molly Dundon described her thesis, "Information Warfare in the High-End Fight." Thomas immediately acknowledged the relevance of her research due to information being a high priority focus area within Great Power Competition.

"It's a unique thing to the Marine Corps to be able to do such high-level research here with so many professionals," said Dundon. "Getting such direct feedback helps us capitalize our time to make [our time] here most beneficial to the Marine Corps so we can make a big impact."

According to Col. Randy Pugh, NPS Senior Marine Corps Representative, the USMC is looking at new capabilities and has a host of questions, all of which should be answered by people who have an excellent grasp on military operations, significant technical expertise, and critical thinking abilities.

"All NPS students have this rare combination," Pugh said. "And when it combines with our world-class operationally-focused faculty, we have the ability to generate literally hundreds of studies or other kinds of research each year in support of realizing the vision in the Commandant's Planning Guidance."

In addition to engaging students, Thomas and his accompanying leaders got acquainted with NPS' Modeling, Virtual Environments and Simulation (MOVES) program, one of a handful of academic programs at NPS that is exclusively sponsored by the Marine Corps.

"This institute is perfectly suited to quickly think about something, prototype it in a virtual sense, and test it to see if it has merit or not before investing in it for the field," explained Pugh.

NPS President retired Vice Adm. Ann Rondeau noted that the university is positioned to be a place of modeling and simulation (M&S) for the Navy and the Marine Corps.

“We can help the Navy and Marine Corps understand that M&S can happen here, and we can look at challenges that need M&S to solve them,” said Rondeau. “NPS is a place for growth and potential and there are no other places at this level of integration.”

Thomas also visited NPS’ Center for Autonomous Vehicle Research (CAVR) where faculty and students demonstrated ongoing research on improving artificial intelligence parameters to produce better combat simulations, advancements in autonomous vehicles, and partnerships with 5G companies to encourage further developments through the broadband network.

“From my perspective, the highlight of the trip was the opportunity for the general officers to talk directly with the NPS students,” said Pugh. “I hope that the ACMC and the other generals validate what I am sure they already suspect—that NPS students represent incredible potential to solve many of today’s tough challenges and to provide the 21st century leadership our 21st century force will require.

“This trust should result in NPS students getting the first crack at really hard operational problems,” continued Pugh. “And, as our alumni progress through the ranks, they will be uniquely qualified for the most demanding leadership jobs in the Marine Corps.”